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## SOCIAL LIFE IN THE COUNTRY

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Social life in the country appears in the following forms, in the associations of the family group, in the recreative meetings which grow out of the experiences of labor, in the assemblies of people at the church, in casual public gatherings, not universal among country people, at the country schoolhouse, and most important of all, in the casual meetings of country people at their places of informal association. That is, country life is dependent upon the family group, the church, the school and the store for associative experience. In addition to this, the effect of labor itself is seen in certain reactions in the way of recreation.

Country life has been sifted by the influence of machine industry and of the railroad. The interurban trolley and other centralizing modes of transportation show that in the country there is left no way of getting a living except farming. The country community is dependent upon agriculture for its economic processes which are fundamental.

Moreover, country life is dominated by labor. No other aspect of modern life is so industrialized as country life. It appears that no one, broadly speaking, has remained in the country except those who stay there for a livelihood. The more enterprising, the bolder spirits, the more active members of the population, have been tempted away by the attractions of the city, of the railroad town, of the factory and of the mine. It is true that in some sections, especially of the older states, there is the remainder of an indolent population who live in the country because of lethargy, but such conditions are not prevalent throughout the country. The striking fact on which generalization should be based is that country life has been uniformly made industrial. It presents to the observer a wide aspect of hard labor, long hours and very slight modifications in the way of recreation or social pleasure. There is no leisure, and there is no leadership, broadly speaking, in country life.

This condition takes on a special form in those parts of the country which produce, as almost all parts do now produce, a staple crop. The farm land of the United States is mapped out by the demands of the market, according to the "money crop" of that region. The hard work of farming is thus systematized.

In the hop region, for instance, work is seasonal and the processes of labor are rigorously defined by the possibilities of the crop and the demands of the market. The same may be said of the wheat, corn or tobacco region.

Work in the dairy country is not so much seasonal, as it is systematic. The work for the various hours of the day is as rigorously prescribed to the dairy farmer as the work for the months of the year is for the tobacco farmer. Everybody in the dairy country goes to bed and rises, he eats and sleeps, he visits or goes to church, according to the exactions of the city market for milk and the physiological possibilities of the dairy cow.

This system on which farm labor is done regulates the social life in the country, according to the normal reactions of work and play. Broadly speaking, this interaction of work and play in any social population obeys a law: systematic labor reacts in organized recreation. Wherever there is a factory town, there is a playground. Wholesome and normal labor conditions produce, quantity for quantity, a normal and wholesome amount of recreative life. Workingmen generally turn after the hours of self-repression and minute regulation to play together. Wage earning involves long hours of involuntary labor. Its processes inhibit voluntary acts and forbid normal activities in self expression. As a result, when the hours of labor are over and the regulations of the factory are lifted, the worker turns to play. This play is generally organized, because the custom of systematic labor reacts in a greater self expression through organized, than through solitary activity.

The same rule dominates country life. Labor being universal, the craving for play is always universal. Allowing for a sifting out of the country population by a process which sends the convivial spirits to the city and the town, the result in the country is the same as in the city. The systematization of work in country communities reacts in a craving for organized recreation, which is the first influence in the social life of country communities.

Nothing impresses the observer of country people so much as

the uniformity of long hours at hard labor. We found in investigating these country conditions in four states that among country people the proportion of those who are regularly industrious exceeds ninety-two per cent. The number who are idlers or are irregularly employed is very small. Those who do not work, and work hard, are by the economic sifting of the population excluded from country communities. It is also true that in the country there is an increasing specialization and systematization of farm labor. The raising of staple crops has organized the open country into districts, and in these regions the whole year is allotted to certain processes. The hours of the day are regulated with little liberty for the farmer. All his time, broadly speaking, is assigned to the regular processes of his industry.

This uniformity of labor and increasing system among farmers would lead one to expect a reaction in the way of organized recreation, for in other sections of the population organized work leads to organized play. Social life is adapted to the system followed by labor, and social intercourse is stimulated by the very intensity with which men apply themselves to organized work. But in the country, if the same law works, its effect must be discovered in three ways.

First of all, the worker in the country takes his reaction in a solitary form. The play spirit does not in so far organize men in social life. Refreshment after labor does not stimulate, but rather diminishes social intercourse. These solitary recreations are hunting, fishing and similar sports, the total quantity of which, however, is bound to diminish as time passes.

Second. The working of this law of systematic play as a corollary of systematic labor doubtless expels from the country community the convivial types of men and tends to select for the country community the more staid and unemotional, the more austere and repressive types of men.

Third. The working of this law doubtless builds up in the large towns and villages an artificial social life, almost entirely commercialized, in moving-picture shows, saloons, billiard halls, lodge rooms, the quantity of which is greater in these towns and even in the villages, because it is excluded from the open country.

This concentration of social life in the large villages and towns and in the smaller cities is a striking fact in the country. I think

it is one of the most lamentable conditions affecting country life. To begin with, the farmer, while in the large town, is away from home and released from the customs and traditions of his own neighborhood. He is out of the inspection and away from the normal checks and obligations of his own community. The situation tends to a letting down of moral standards and to a loosening of scruples in regard to moral conduct. It tends also mightily toward the removal of the young people and the working people from the farm. If it be allowed that there is vital connection between work and play, it follows that the situation in which play is concentrated in given communities and work is distributed over other communities, the allurements of the communities in which recreation is provided will prove almost irresistible.

An economic factor entering profoundly into this situation is exhibited in the fact that large towns and small cities throughout the United States generally live not directly off the land about them, but indirectly through the middleman and the bigger cities. These towns in most cases have no market. The farmers of the country round about cannot sell in these towns the produce of their lands. For instance, in the town of Owego, N. Y., in Tioga County, which is a dairy county, the townsmen purchase their butter and dairy products from New York City. Every product of the creamery is priced in this community at a slightly higher rate than that at which it is sold in New York City. The result is that the social life and the religious life of Owego are divorced sharply from that of the country round about. Residents in the country either avoid Owego socially and religiously, or they give up the country and reside in Owego. There is no natural and normal intercourse between town and country.

In such a community, owing to this economic wall around them, it is noticeable that the land within two miles of the town limits is poorly tilled. The attraction of town life is such as to draw away from the farmer his hired hands, his son and his daughter for town work and town wages. Beyond the two-mile zone farming is better done and country life retains some of its normal aspect. Churches are better attended, granges prosper and hired men are found working on the farms. The fundamental cause of this social division between town and country is in the fact pointed out by Sir Horace Plunkett, that the characteristic American town

or small city does not buy its food from the country round about. The land within sight of the city streets of Clearfield, Pa., does not pay the taxes that are laid upon it by the state.

The most important indications of the social tendencies of the community are the casual meetings. Places of informal association have a greater value in socializing than the appointed meeting places of the people. Especially is this true in those communities in which there is no appointment of meeting. We discovered in the Pennsylvania communities that the places of casual meeting are almost exclusively places of trade, such as stores, barber shops, or places of public necessity, as railway stations and post offices. The frequency of meeting in these places occupies a proportionately greater rank than all other meeting places combined. Generally throughout these communities, in which the population is made up of farmers, there is no public and accessible center of association. Club rooms are not provided, lodge rooms are not open, and the casual constant meetings of the people have to be incidental to trade, travel or labor.

These casual meetings in the country community are, it is admitted, a wholly insufficient socializing experience. I desire to note them because of that fact, and as a means of showing further that they impress themselves upon rural society in intensifying the purely economic character of it. The fact that in the country community people meet nowhere except in the store or post office, the railroad station, the blacksmith shop, the grain elevator and on the sidewalk, saturates the social mind with economic commonplaces. People are under the influence of the occasional small talk of buying and selling, of prices, and of the bare necessities of life. There is in these casual meetings little of politics or religion and nothing of art, literature, social reform. The substance of conversation and discussion in such meetings is conditioned by the environment. Traditionally, the farmer talks politics at the country store and discusses religion in the post office; actually, he talks in the store butter and raisins and horses and harnesses and the commonplace experiences which would naturally suggest themselves in a country store. There is, indeed, an occasional tendency, dependent largely upon personalities, to launch into the two fields of politics and religion, but it is doubtful whether the political or religious discussion under such auspices is of value to the state or to the church. The environment of the discussion would probably prevent it.

A factor of increasing consequence in the country is the growth of class consciousness. The country population is rapidly changing in its personnel. Speculation in land is for the present a dominating economic experience in the country. A most extensive change in land ownership is going on, resulting, it is to be hoped, in "the farms passing into the hands of those who will till them to the best advantage." Its present and immediate effects are an injection into the country community of alien human material. Four farmers out of ten throughout the United States are renters. If these tenant farmers were a permanent factor in the rural personnel, the condition would be serious, but they have only a one year's lease on the land. In consequence, their relation to the country is but temporary. The place they occupy in the country population is not measured in terms of their personality, but by the land they till, so that the intimacy of social intercourse in the country is diluted still further by this fluid element poured into the veins of the community through the one-year lease system.

Remembering now, that through machinery the number of people who work in the country is diminished, it is obvious that the old warmth and the one time high intelligence of social intercourse in the country, based upon the industry itself, are much lessened. Unfortunately, the class distinctions in the country do not attain to genial or attractive stages. The country church exhibits this in the fact observed in Pennsylvania that when there is but one class in the country and all men live on the same level, sixty-four per cent of the country churches grow and thrive. When there are two classes in the country who do not eat and drink together, who do not intermarry and who live after differing social modes, only thirty-four per cent of the country churches thrive. But in those communities into which more than two classes have come, sixty-eight per cent of the churches thrive, and increase in membership. This indicates, I think, that the difficulties of social life are at the very greatest when a class distinction first separates country people and in the same community are two modes of social intercourse. In the country community everybody must know everybody else. Men are accustomed to meet weekly and almost daily. Under such conditions, if there be a check upon free intercourse and a limit to the degree of human intimacy on fixed and defined bounds, it has a worse and more hostile effect than

the elaborate distinctions have in the city; for in the city men can select their acquaintances. In the country, a man's whole life is lived, except for a few experiences, in the boundaries of the rural community. The division of the country community into two classes, among a people already diminished or confined by the gravitation of the country life to intercourse with one another, results in a very lamentable state of social feeling and gives to country life a forbidding social aspect.

Coming now to the three institutions worth naming which are general throughout the country, the school, the church and the household, we must recognize that in these three is expressed the American conception of country life. The type of American life on which our ideals have been based and to which our laws have been conformed, the economic type which was apparently in the mind of the writers of the Constitution of the United States, is the type of the household farmer. This economic type is expressed in the residence of the farmer on his own land, which is tilled by the economic group made up of the farmer, his wife, his children and immediate kinsmen. It includes also the hired man and sometimes a hired girl, though the hired man is increasingly difficult to secure and the hired girl has become little more than a tradition.

The one-room school in the country is the institution suited to the economic process of household farming. It is organized on the principle that a minimum of education is needed since the household is sufficient unto itself. The same principle explains the weakness and insufficiency for modern life of the country church. It results, therefore, that the one-room country school makes nowadays, when household farming is a weakened economic mode, little provision for social life. In some districts the school has a few gatherings. In a very few places throughout the country the parents have a custom of meeting in connection with the school, but generally speaking, the teacher's one motive is to earn her insufficient wage. In most cases the teacher never returns for a second year in the same community and the country school is not throughout the United States a social center.

Brilliant exceptions to this statement may be cited. It is more important, however, to recognize the general condition, which is so general that I think it should be taken as an indication that with the alteration of the economic mode in the country and the passing



of the period of household farming, the country school, which was suited unto that period, has been discredited. It appears to have lost the confidence of the farmer. He is not eagerly looking for a better method, but he has ceased to repair the country school and he employs the teacher chiefly because he has to, using little discrimination and having little enthusiasm in the process. It follows, of course, that the country school is an institution of little dynamic value in the country. Without a radical adjustment to country life it cannot be relied on as a center of social life. Those instances in which one-room country schools have been social centers are explained by the personality of the teacher; and we have not a sufficient number of brilliant personalities to lift the institution to the new plane.

The country church, which was erected by the household farmer and adapted to his mode of life, is but little better. Fortunately, it has the advantage of the school, in that it is the place of accustomed meeting for people of all ages, of both sexes and, theoretically, of all classes in the community. Its social value is somewhat intensified also by its conformity to the social cleavage of the community. Unfortunate as it may be, the churches in the country have been churches for land owners, churches for tenants, churches for Scotch-Irish, churches for the Pennsylvania Germans. Wherever there was a social distinction of which the people have been conscious, it has built itself a church. This condition, lamentable as it is from the point of view of progress, is in static respects an excellent thing for the country, for it has intensified the social consciousness of the people assembling with those of their own class for the worship of God.

The state of social life which is thus so easily explained, in which the church is an expression of the social cleavage of the people, is from the point of view of progress lamentable. Social life in the country is divided by the very institutions which express its idealism. Country communities are split up in so far as the church can register their cleavage into little groups whose only significance is some doctrine now forgotten, or some racial origin now little regarded. The churches in the country are far too many in number. They become the vehicle of expressing grudges, resentments, narrow and mean social feelings and the facility of division among them makes them the exponent of all the unworthy and retrograde forces in social life.

The story of this overchurching of the country has been so often told that it need not here be repeated. Examples like the town in Pennsylvania, in which within a four miles' drive of a given point in the open country are twenty-four country churches, are numerous in all parts of the country, though this particular instance is the limit. I do not know a worse one. In a Michigan group of villages, the whole population of which is seventeen hundred, there are fifteen country churches in which thirteen resident ministers are at work. The tendency of these churches is to keep the towns divided, mean-spirited and socially trivial. Among all religious people the ideal of union and federation is growing. Nothing will be more difficult than the accomplishing of this federation, but there is no hope for the country without it. The same spirit will result in co-operative organizations of the farmers and in the centralizing of the schools, but even when these two great reforms have been effected, it will still be necessary for the churches to work out their own problem of federation.

Social life among all these churches is in a certain sort general, but it is thoroughly commercialized. The providing of sociables, oyster suppers, church dinners and occasional lecture courses is a function in which the churches quite generally lead. The motives for doing this are identical with the motives of the lodges in the small towns, which also provide some commercialized social life. It is the motive of making money for the organization. The price mark is on everything connected with these fairs and sales and suppers, and at this point the churches are restless. The men of the churches are dissatisfied with the bad business done by the organizations which provide social life so adulterated. Most of these are women's organizations.

It is to be said, however, that in communities where so few meeting places are provided by any one, these social enterprises of the women of the country churches have great value. The fact that they are commercialized does not discredit them wholly. There is a general tendency to explore the possibilities of recreation as an ethical utility, and somewhat tamely the churches are attempting that which the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations are doing with determination and assurance, namely, the harnessing of the play spirit that it may do the moral work of the community. If the sociables, fairs, sales and suppers by

which country churches pay a part of their expenses could be put upon a self-respecting basis, and if the system could be greatly extended so as to render a service adequate to the needs of the community, not merely to the needs of the churches, it would have extraordinary value, for what is needed in the country is the development of normal social life under the supervision of the church and the school. These are the two responsible institutions for building up the social structure of country life.

The home should hardly be called an institution. Its processes are instinctive rather than intellectual, especially in the country. The rural household is founded in sentiment. Its life is surrounded with reserve and its integrity is sternly guarded by the strong individualism and independence of country people. The rural household is the fortress and the citadel of American self-respect, and it is therefore almost impossible to affect with any direct influences the good or ill of the country home. Only through the church and the school can influences be made to reach the rural household through the slow course of years, and by the devoted service of teachers and ministers.

But it must be clearly understood that economic processes have undermined the traditional country home. We still hear a good deal of loose and sentimental idealization of the country home, but country people know well that the old-fashioned rural household has disappeared. The tendency of the farmers to retire to the towns, which in the great agricultural states has removed one-half of the land owners from the open country, has done much to break up the country home, because a part of the rural household was its possession of a warm, neighborly atmosphere. The departure of the young men and women to seek their fortune in the city, on the railroad or in the factory towns has dissolved the rural household. The very process which in the city and factory populations is compacting the home is at work in the country dissolving the home. The picture at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893, "Breaking Home Ties," was a classical artistic expression of this lamentable and pitiful process. So far in the open country there has been no economic reconstruction on which the household can be built. Without this reconstruction the rural household, which is the center of social life in the country, cannot be firmly built. Its present weakness is the truest expression of the dilapida-

tion, confusion and weakness of social life in the country. The church and the school in the country should be reconstructed for the purpose of restoring a normal social life, and the test of the success of this process shall be the building of a new country home in which men shall dwell at peace, permanently contented, the son succeeding his father, the daughter contented to remain for her lifetime in the country community. It is useless to commend educational, religious or merely social changes for the repair of rural social life. The fundamental change must be economic, and the farmer must learn by better educational methods how to produce from the land a great abundance, in order that there may be a larger profit for himself and cheaper prices in the city. This scientific agriculture is necessary also for conserving the fertility of the soil.

But scientific agriculture is not teaching the farmer to get himself a better profit. To this end co-operation among farmers is necessary. Certain measures are necessary also that look to the elimination of the middleman so far as possible. The parcels post, the providing of public market places in the larger towns and smaller cities are just as necessary as scientific farming and co-operative organization of farmers. By this means a satisfactory income will in time be secured by the farmer, and when farmers see that their income will be proportionately increased along with the increase of the total product from the land, then the farming population will take courage to practice the biddings of the agricultural scientist.

Social life thus anchored in a secure, profitable and permanent agriculture may be built to this end around the existing institutions in the country, the church and the school. Generally, the schools should be consolidated and centralized so far as possible in the open country. How far this centralizing of country life will be done in the towns and villages one cannot at present say, but it is for the good of the farmer generally that the centralization of the schools in the country be independent of town and village domination. It is important to make clear that the centralizing of schools will not itself follow from economic welfare. It must be done by the school men and is a task to be accomplished by itself.

Another task which will not come automatically as a part of

rural welfare is the reconstruction of the country church. This again is a task for the church men of all denominations. When the church and the school in the country, assisted by the grange, the rural Young Men's Christian Association and other institutions whose influence is great in those territories in which they are organized, have come to their best, then rural social life can be restored to its genial and kindly and humane aspects. But without this thorough-going reconstruction country life will continue to deteriorate so far as our present knowledge goes.